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Mount Snowdon, Wales. Interesting Information For Visitors

By Pat Ransom

If you plan to visit Snowdon in Wales this summer, here is some interesting information about the mountain that you might like to know.

Snowdon, in Welsh, is Yr Wyddfa, which means tomb or monument. Legend has it that it is the tomb of Rhita Gawr, an ogre who would kill kings and make cloaks out of their beards. He supposedly met his end when King Arthur climbed to the top of Mount Snowdon and killed him.

No one knows who first conquered Snowdon, but ascents of the mountain became popular when Thomas Pennant published 'Tours' in 1781 and included his visit to the summit.

Snowdon, as indeed the surrounding area, has been mined since the Bronze Age, and evidence of copper mining can be seen all over the mountain, from old mine buildings, to old tramways. Care should be taken around these old buildings.

Facts and Figures of Snowdon

Snowdon stands 1,085 metres (3,560 feet) high. Each year 350,000 people reach the summit, some on foot and some by train. The summit has 200 inches(508 cm) of rain per year, and can reach temperatures of 30 centigrade in high summer, and plummet to – 20 centigrade in the winter. Add to this winds of up to 150 mph and the temperature can feel more like – 50. The summit buildings at the top can be covered by ice and snow between November and April.

Snowdon Mountain Railway

Before the railway, ponies used to take tourists to the summit of Snowdon. Sir Richard Moon and Mr George Assheton Smith were responsible for the idea of the Snowdon Railway – Sir Moon as a way of boosting tourists using his standard gauge lines, and Mr Smith as he realised that tourist cash may compensate him from the loss of income from his declining mines.

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They imported a fully working 800mm gauge mountain railway from Switzerland. The railway remains the only rack and pinion railway in the UK. It has toothed racks in the centre of the track that engage with cogs under the carriages.

The only accident on the railway occurred on the day it opened to the public in 1896. Engine #1, Ladas, derailed and plummeted down a slope. The crew jumped from the engine and survived, and the guard applied the hand brake to the carriages and brought them to a halt. Unfortunately, one of the passengers panicked and jumped from the carriage, falling onto the tracks and under the wheels. He later died from his injuries. The saga wasn't quite over, as just as the carriages stopped, the engine following behind (Enid – still operating today) hit them from behind!

The railway was closed. Since it reopened the following year there have been no further accidents! And since that date there has never been another Engine #1 on the Snowdon Railway!

The cost of the train trip is not cheap (apart from being a good walk in itself, another reason for trying to make the summit on foot!), but is a great way for those who cannot make the climb to travel to the top. However, good weather cannot be guaranteed, and you may start the trip on a clear day, only to find yourself in cloud as you reach the top.

If you choose to take the train up Mount Snowdon, you can walk back down via the Llanberis Path. You can get some wonderful views of the trains puffing their way up and down from the path. Not all trains are steam – there are also diesel engines.

If you plan to take the train up to the top of Snowdon beware that the trains get very crowded in the summer, and it is best to arrive early or even more advisable to book in advance by ringing 0870 458 0033 at least the day before. If you don't you may have a long wait. A board by the ticket office will tell you which is the next train with available seats. You can buy a return, or a single to the top. Single tickets for the journey down are sold on standby basis only.

Weather permitting the trains run from mid May to the end of October right to the summit, but from mid March, and a little way into November, stop at Clogwyn. Trains start running at 9am and continue until late afternoon.

Buildings on Snowdon Summit

In 1820 the first stone shelter was built at the summit by a guide named Lloyd. A copper miner, William Morris, had the idea of selling refreshments from the shelter – an idea which continues to the present day. Having walked up the mountain it is probably as welcome today, as it was to the earlier tourist, to be able to have something to eat and drink before tackling the descent.

Two hotels were opened on the summit, one called Roberts Hotel, the other the Cold Club. Both were in fierce competition with each other. There were often more visitors than beds though, and conditions were not the best. By 1898 the Snowdon Mountain Railway and Hotels Company had taken over the hotels, and started to rebuild them – the fierce conditions on the top of Mount Snowdon means that any

building had a limited life. By the 1930s it was decided to replace the summit buildings with a multipurpose hotel, cafe and station. With little regard to conservation, the builders simply pushed the derelict old huts over the side of the mountain to make way for the new build (imagine the uproar today!). Sir Clough William–Ellis, the architect and designer of nearby Portmerion, designed the new building, complete with huge picture windows so visitors could best enjoy the panoramic views. Unfortunately the windows lasted only six months before they were blown in and had to be replaced with much smaller ones.

During the war years the summit buildings were used by the Ministry of Supply for experimental radio work, and subsequently by Air Ministry, Admiralty and Armed forces, and the mountain top was closed to tourists. The hotel did not reopen to tourists after the war.

In 2004 it was agreed that the summit buildings would undergo a total refurbishment. Demolition is due to start in the autumn of 2006, with the new centre being ready in 2007. There has been much debate about the form of the new buildings, but one thing is certain – whatever the new buildings look like, they will always be a welcome sight to walkers who have struggled their way to the top of the mountain!

If you are going on holiday in North Wales you may well wish to ascend to the summit of Snowdon, either on foot or by the Snowdon Mountain Railway. This article gives you interesting information about the mountain, railway and the buildings on the summit.

<http://www.mountainwalk.co.uk>

Walking On The Mountains – Check The Weather!

By Pat Ransom

Many people planning to holiday in Snowdonia, the Highlands of Scotland or the Lake District this summer will be considering a walk on the hills or mountains. If you are planning one of the high walks, apart from your fitness and how sore your feet will get, one of your main considerations will be the WEATHER.

Before you start on your walk you will be getting together your hiking shoes, filling your backpack with provisions but please don't forget to CHECK THE WEATHER! The Met Office has forecasts for the Lake District, Snowdonia and Scotland. Even if it looks like it is going to be a nice day you can never be certain what is going to sweep in across the hills. If you are walking Ben Nevis or Snowdon you can be on the hills for most of the day - plenty of time for the weather to change! Knowing and being prepared for the weather conditions will add to your enjoyment of your day, and will keep you safe.

Weather on the mountains is very unpredictable - almost unbelievably so at times. It is very possible that you will choose a lovely clear day for your climb, and will start the day in a tee shirt with the sun beating down on your back.

As you start to climb higher you may find that cloud begins to form, and the summit will be hidden from view! You will be safe if you keep to the well trodden paths, but it is really not advisable to go too far

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from the track. The cloud and mist can form very quickly and become very thick and it is very easy to quickly become disorientated and lose your way.

Another thing you will notice as you climb the mountain is that the temperature will drop. It will certainly be much colder at the top than at the bottom – particularly in low cloud. The average temperature on the summit of Ben Nevis is –1 degree centigrade. You will need to take a jumper even if you start off on a warm summer's day, and will also need a waterproof in case of low cloud or mist – this can be very wet, and if you are not suitably prepared, your clothes will get sodden.

Visit

<http://www.mountainwalk.co.uk/weather.html>

to see examples of weather changes on walks up

Snowdon and Ben Nevis. The photographs on this page were all taken on the same walk on an early August day up the Watkins Path of Mount Snowdon. The day started off without a cloud in the sky – three hours later we were scrambling through thick cloud and near gale force winds, getting very wet. Once the summit of Snowdon was reached there were no photo opportunities - apart from being able to see nothing through the cloud, there was also the strong wind that threatened to blow walkers off the top of the cairn!

Snowdon does have the benefit of its summit cafe although it can get very crowded. When you walk up Snowdon you can feel that you have achieved something, even if mist spoils the view.

And just to show mountains have the same typical weather, the same web page shows a walk up Ben Nevis. Again the start of the walk up has the sun shining, but the summit shrouded in mist!

The lesson is be prepared – and especially so on in late spring or early autumn where you could find yourself scrambling through snow on the higher peaks and hills.

And if you are a novice walker it is best to avoid the worst weather of the winter months entirely, unless you go with an experienced guide.

Pat Ransom has walked both Snowdon and Ben Nevis and encourages others to do the same on the website

<http://www.mountainwalk.co.uk>

. Being a keen photographer the site is full of photos of both

mountains and the surrounding areas.



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